

DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF  
AND ATTACHMENT IN FAMILIES OF ORIGIN

A THESIS-PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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MAY 2017



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first and foremost want to thank the Great I Am for placing within me a hunger for learning and understanding people. I pray that I steward that hunger in a way that advances the Kingdom of God on earth as in heaven. I am deeply grateful for my parents who cultivated within me a desire to read and learn and for my in-laws who have been constant sources of encouragement and prayer. To my two beautiful children, Natalie and Isaac; thank you for being patient with Daddy while he finished his “book.” Thank you for teaching me how to be present and patient. To my wife, Tara; the depth of your beauty, knowledge, and sacrifice is immense. I hope to be like you someday. To Dr. Karen Mason and Dr. Ray Pendleton; thank you for being kind and caring guides on this therapeutic journey. And finally, to Scott Vaudrey; a true physician’s assistant who first walked with me into the valley and out onto the other side.

## ABSTRACT

All young couples entering into marriage will face many challenges as they adjust to being a newly formed family system. The challenges will be holistic in nature and include mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, and social adjustments. Each challenge and adjustment will increase the amount of anxiety within the newly formed family system. The process of how the newly formed family system will handle the anxiety will determine whether or not the marital bond strengthens or weakens. The concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), Attachment Theory (AT), and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) can help any new marital couple increase differentiation of self and healthy attachment. An increase in differentiation and healthy attachment would lead to the development of a stronger marriage.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT IS THE FAMILY?

#### **Family Systems and Attachment**

Pete, a 22-year-old aspiring minister, and Traci, a 22-year-old aspiring physician's assistant who also feels called to be a pastor's wife, marry shortly after Pete's collegiate graduation and immediately before Traci's entry into physician's assistant school. Their first year of marriage is primarily enjoyable and anxiety free. But, marital difficulty begins at the beginning of year two when Traci must spend significant time away from Pete doing medical internships. Pete fills the void of Traci's absence by agreeing to coach women's basketball at a local junior college. Pete is also a full-time pastor of education at a local church.

During Traci's absence, Pete begins to develop symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Pete also feels attracted to the female athletes playing on his team. Traci returns home most weekends but experiences difficulty connecting with Pete, who stays busy with coaching and ministry. At the start of year three, Pete and Traci feel themselves drifting apart from one another, Pete's anxiety increases dramatically, and a group of parishioners from Pete's church starts a secret campaign to have Pete fired as education pastor. Pete and Traci are overwhelmed.

Pete's and Traci's marital difficulties are not abnormal for a couple where at least one spouse feels called to ministry. Scazzero and Bird's (2003) seminal work, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, indicated that a significant number of clergy suffer burnout early in ministry experience with the clergy's family suffering its effects. When burnout

occurs in a member of clergy, it would be easy to focus on the actions and behavior of the clergy spouse. After all, is not the clergy spouse the problem? However, what if the cause of burnout and marital discord extends beyond the clergy spouse? What role might the non-clergy spouse play? What if marriage and separate families of origin are parts of the problem? If the problem extends beyond the clergy spouse/non-clergy spouse dyad, the question for Pete and Traci would be, “What could be the true and holistic causes of their marital discord and how could understanding and addressing these causes strengthen their new marriage?”

The theoretical approaches of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) and Attachment Theory (AT) can be of significant assistance in understanding the marital discord encountered by Pete and Traci or any other couple entering into a new marriage. The theoretical approach of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) could help couples like Pete and Traci identify and address causes of poor marital attachment that result in marital discord. What follows is a description of all three theories: Bowen Family Systems Theory, Attachment Theory, and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy. After their theoretical descriptions, their application to this thesis project is stated and further explained.

### **Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST)**

Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist primarily interested in schizophrenia, began to formulate his theory of family in the 1940s while working at the Menninger Clinic and continued to develop BFST while working at the National Institute of Mental Health and Georgetown University (Nichols, 2013). While working with families of patients with

schizophrenia, Bowen identified the key concepts to his theory as nuclear family emotional system, differentiation of self, triangles, cutoff, the family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, and emotional process in society (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006).

The theory's primary concept is differentiation of self. Bowen (1978) believed that a family's overall health could increase if each member of a family works to focus on their own emotional processes (Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 2006; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). As a family's overall level of differentiation increases, family anxiety will decrease.

**Nuclear Family Emotional System.** Bowen (1978) described the formation of a married couple as a new emotional oneness. The new oneness of a couple establishes a nuclear emotional system that will replace their family of origin's system as primary. When a couple marries, they carry their family of origin's anxiety, fusion, and family position with them into their new union and a new emotional system is established.

Gilbert (2006) described the concept of the nuclear family emotional system as the foundational concept upon which the other BFST concepts are built. Components of nuclear family emotional systems are the existence of anxiety, emotional fusion, triangulation, and differentiation. While triangulation and differentiation are each individual components of BFST, anxiety and fusion are characteristics of the theory that either increase or decrease depending upon the existence of the other seven concepts; differentiation of self, triangles, cutoff, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, and emotional process in society.

**Differentiation of Self.** Bowen (1978) defined differentiation as the ability of a person to maintain contact within a family's emotional system as a non-anxious presence. As a non-anxious presence, a person would be able to state "I" positions, use logic to make decisions, and remain calm when systemic anxiety increased (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 2006; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

According to Bowen (1978), differentiation existed on a scale of 0 to 100 with greater differentiated persons existing at the higher end of the scale and lower differentiated persons existing at the lower end of the scale. Higher levels of differentiation would lead to lesser amounts of anxiety within a person while lower levels of differentiation would lead to higher amounts of anxiety. Bowen believed that lower levels of differentiation led to an increase in family fusion and physical symptoms. Marital couples with low differentiation most often present with one spouse having an increased ability to function and another spouse having a decreased ability to function. The "weak" spouse borrows function from the "stronger" spouse and the "stronger" spouse borrows identity from the "weaker" spouse (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Gilbert, 2006).

**Triangles.** Bowen (1978) believed that triangles are the basic social unit of human existence. All relationships exist in triangles, according to BFST (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 2006; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The primary dyad in a family, according to Bowen, would be the husband and wife dyad with a child likely serving as the third part of the triangle. Bowen (1978) stated the following regarding triangles: "As tension mounts in a two-person system, it is usual for one to be more uncomfortable than the other, and for the uncomfortable one to 'triangle in' a third person by telling the

second person a story about the triangled one” (p. 478). As anxiety increased within the marital dyad, either the husband or wife would relieve the dyad’s anxiety by focusing on the triangulated child or including that child in the conflict. Bowen believed that if too much anxiety was passed onto the child, physical symptoms would manifest (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Gilbert, 2006). A child could then present as the identified patient, a concept that will later be addressed in the section on the family projection process.

Bowen (1978) also believed that triangles existed in the larger societal systems. This idea will also be addressed later, but the author believes it important to point out the idea that triangles exist outside of family units as well as inside family units, especially when considering workplace systems. BFST teaches that anxiety is passed through family systems and social systems via triangles (Bowen, 1988; Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 2006; Kerr & Bowen, 1998). Higher levels of differentiation within each triangle reduce the amount of anxiety passed from triangle to triangle. This idea of anxious transmission within systems is important not only for family systems, but workplace systems as well. Healthy families that create environments fostering high levels of differentiation will most likely produce the healthiest leaders for companies to recruit (Gilbert, 2006).

**Cutoff.** Bowen (1978) described cutoff as an active process that included the actions of separating, isolating, withdrawing, running away, and denying the importance of the parental family. Cutoff could be viewed as the extreme end of differentiation; a complete removal from the family system. Cutoff is most employed by individuals who desire to remove themselves from uncomfortable, fused family systems (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1985; Gilbert, 2006; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). These individuals appear to be more differentiated and less anxious. However, their inability to be a non-anxious

presence within the emotional family field is an indicator that their desire to cut off is driven by high levels of anxiety (Friedman, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). According to Gilbert (2006), the process of cutting off from the emotional family field increases the likelihood that family problems persist and even exaggerate in the following generations.

**Family Projection Process.** Bowen (1978) described the family projection process as the process during which a family system's anxiety is projected onto a specific person within the system, with that person most likely being a child. Bowen believed that projection most often occurred when an anxious mother triangulated a child into a wife-husband conflict. Friedman (1985) labeled the person presenting with the projected anxiety as the "identified patient." Friedman said, "The family member with the obvious symptom is to be seen not as the 'sick one' but as the one in whom the family's stress or pathology has surfaced" (p. 19). If a child was projected onto as the identified patient, the child could present physical symptoms that would then cause the family system to focus even more on the child. As the focus on the child increased, so would the systemic anxiety placed upon the child. As the system anxiety placed upon the child increased, what this author calls a "doom loop" would develop; more anxiety placement would lead to greater symptom development, which would result in more anxiety placement. This doom loop of systemic anxiety would continue until death or a family event occurred that would shift the projection process away from the former identified patient (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

**Multigenerational Transmission Process.** Bowen (1978) believed that both low and high levels of differentiation would be transmitted from generation to generation through the multigenerational transmission process. Individuals with low

levels of differentiation would pass along high anxiety and an inability to function onto their offspring. As generations along this low differentiation line continued to reproduce, the family system's overall level of anxiety would increase and function would decrease. Bowen believed the same regarding individuals with high levels of differentiation; as reproduction occurred through the generations, anxiety would decrease and function would increase.

**Sibling Position.** Gilbert (2006) indicated that Bowen borrowed from Dr. Walter Toman when studying the theory of sibling position. According to Bowen (1985), the different sibling positions “make it quite clear that no two children experience the family in the same way. Each position is so different from any other that is as if no two children have the same family” (p. 85). A child's ability to maintain a non-anxious presence would, therefore, be affected by his or her sibling position and how the child functioned within that position.

**Emotional Process in Society.** Boss and Doherty (1993) labeled society in general as a super-system that maintains characteristics of its smaller systems like family systems. Bowen (1985) stated, “There is also a phenomenon of the infectiousness of anxiety, through which anxiety can spread rapidly through the family, or through society” (p. 362). Therefore, according to Boss et al. and Bowen, societal issues can be magnifications of family issues. Such a theory could have massive implications in addressing social systemic issues through the focus on producing healthy family systems. The same would be true regarding workplace systems; workplace systemic issues could be addressed by focusing upon lower-level family systems within a workplace system.

## **Attachment Theory (AT)**

Ainsworth (1989, p. 44) highlighted three primary traits of attachment theory; “infants form attachments to any consistent caregiver who is sensitive and responsive in social interactions with the infant,” there is a crucial period for attachment to occur that ranges between six months and two to three years, and the quality of social engagement between the infant and mother or caregiver appears more important than the amount of time. Ainsworth, along with Bowlby (1988), theorized that, dependent upon the quality of child-mother interaction, an infant will form three different types of attachment style: secure, anxious resistant, and anxious avoidant. Anxious resistant has also been labeled ambivalent (Bowlby, 1988; Clinton & Sibcy, 2006). Main and Weston (1981), as referenced by Bowlby, identified a fourth attachment style, disorganized. Clinton and Sibcy expounded on the disorganized attachment style in their seminal work, *Why You Do the Things You Do*.

**Secure Attachment.** If an infant forms proper attachment during the formative period, the child will develop what is called a secure attachment style; the infant will be able to confidently explore the world and relationally attach to others as he or she develops into an older person (Bowlby, 1988; Clinton & Sibcy, 2006; Clinton & Sibcy, 2014). Bowlby (1988) cited Ainsworth and stated that a securely attached person “will be available, responsive, and helpful should he encounter adverse or frightening situations” (p. 124). Clinton and Sibcy (2014) further expanded on the description of secure attachment by stating that a securely attached person feels worthy of love, believes others are willing and available to provide love, has a full range of emotion, can self-soothe, shares feelings, and is able to commit to a relationship. A securely attached

person places a balanced amount of interest in a relationship with another person.

**Anxious Resistant or Anxious Ambivalent.** If infants do not form proper attachment during the formative period, they will develop an anxious resistant attachment style also known as anxious ambivalent (Bowlby, 1988; Clinton & Sibcy, 2006; 2014). Bowlby (1988), again borrowing from Ainsworth, wrote that a person with an anxious resistant attachment style will be “prone to separation anxiety, tends to be clinging, and is anxious about exploring the world” (p. 124). Clinton and Sibcy (2006; 2014) labeled the anxious resistant attachment style as ambivalent. They stated that a person with an ambivalent attachment style does not feel worthy of love, believes others are unwilling to provide love, has full range of emotion but is unable to fully control their emotion, and desires to be close, but never seems to have enough (Clinton & Sibcy; 2014). An anxious resistant person over focuses on the individuals with whom attachment is desired.

**Anxious Avoidant.** An anxious avoidant attachment style results in a withdrawing from individuals with whom attachment is desired. Bowlby (1988) stated that a person with an anxious avoidant attachment style “has no confidence that, when he seeks care, he will be responded to helpfully, but, on the contrary, expects to be rebuffed” (p. 124). Bowlby also linked an anxious avoidant person with the development of narcissism and a false self. Clinton and Sibcy (2014) labeled this attachment style as avoidant and stated that avoidant persons feel worthy of love but believe that others are incapable of providing love, have a limited range of emotion, are not comfortable with emotion, and work to distance themselves from others. An anxious avoidant person will not provide the opportunity for another person to bond with them due to fear of being

disappointed.

**Disorganized.** Main and Weston (1981), as cited by Bowlby (1988), labeled a fourth non-secure attachment style: disorganized. Clinton and Sibcy (2014) described a person with disorganized attachment as someone who feels unworthy of love, believes others are unable and unwilling to provide love, has a full range of emotion but few positive emotions, desires closeness but sabotages it, and is attracted to people who victimize others. Bowlby (1988) cited Crittenden (1985) and wrote that infants with a disorganized attachment style “have been physically abused or grossly neglected by the parent” (p. 125). If a person displays a disorganized attachment pattern, he or she will anxiously work to attach to another person but then withdraw from that person once attachment starts to form.

### **Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT)**

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT) was primarily developed by Sue Johnson as a result of an increase in the understanding of emotions in the field of marital therapy. EFCT is an integrative approach that primarily combines an emphasis upon emotion and Attachment Theory (AT). Johnson (2004) indicated that there are three primary tasks of EFCT: fostering a therapeutic alliance, accessing and formulating emotion, and restructuring couple interactions. The primary goal of EFCT is to help couples identify and process emotions and emotional responses so that new patterns of emotional interaction develop within a marital dyad. If new patterns of emotional interaction develop within a marital dyad, greater levels of attachment would be evident.

**Fostering a Therapeutic Alliance.** Johnson (2004) used the metaphor of a dance to describe EFCT and states that “emotion is then the music in the dance of adult intimacy. When we change the music, we change the dance” (p. 67). The therapist, according to the metaphor, is similar to a highly involved dance instructor. A therapist will work hard to establish a therapeutic alliance with the client by practicing empathic attunement, acceptance, and genuineness, by employing continuous active monitoring, and by joining the system. If a therapist is successful, couples will be able to identify and process emotions and emotional responses in healthier ways. As a result, the couples will become better emotional dance partners.

**The Centrality of Emotion.** When describing the key tenets of EFCT, Johnson (2004) stated, “Emotional accessibility and responsiveness build bonds” (p. 26). Therefore, according to EFCT, if a couple desires to grow to more secure levels of attachment, emotions are key. Johnson called emotions “a rich source of meaning” that give “us powerful compelling feedback as to how our environment is affecting us” (p. 65). Johnson stated that there are two types of emotions: primary and secondary. Primary emotions are more direct responses to a situation and secondary emotions are “reactions to, and attempts to cope with” the more primary emotions (p. 68). Johnson listed the following universal emotions key to EFCT: anger, fear, surprise, joy, shame/disgust, hurt/anguish, and sadness/despair.

The emotions and direct responses to a situation, primary emotions, can be primarily observed by watching body language and hearing spoken words. Sometimes such observations indicate very clear emotional responses. However, if persons are unable to understand how a situation makes them feel, their physical outward responses

might not match their inward attempts to cope. These inward attempts to cope are the secondary emotions highlighted in EFCT. When such disconnect occurs, a couple is unable to connect on an emotional level. According to EFCT, a couple must understand their emotional responses, communicate those responses to their spouse, and the spouse must respond in empathic and understanding ways.

**Restructuring Couple Interaction.** Therefore, a successful EFCT therapist will assist couples with the understanding and communication of secondary emotions so that primary emotional responses will be more conducive to attachment. This is called “restructuring and shaping interaction” (Johnson, 2004, p. 96). Once interactions are restructured, couples should be able to better communicate the universal emotions of anger, fear, surprise, joy, shame/disgust, hurt/anguish, and sadness/despair. Successful EFCT will include such restructuring and normally develop between eight to twenty sessions.

### **Theoretical Application**

The marital health of newlywed couples will be highly determined by the attachment style and the levels of differentiation of self that each spouse developed within their families of origin. More secure attachment styles and higher levels of differentiation of self within families of origin will result in more secure attachment within the marital dyad and thus produce healthier marriages. As an aside, more secure attachment styles and higher levels of differentiation of self will result in greater leadership efficacy for when performing in systems outside of the family system (Freidman, 1985; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). Anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment

styles and lower levels of differentiation of self from families of origin will result in either avoidant, anxious, or disorganized levels of attachment within the marital dyad and will result in marriages in conflict. An employee with a marriage in conflict will result in poor leadership within their staff team.

This thesis is written to help newlywed couples, like Pete and Traci discern their individual levels of differentiation of self and attachment styles. *Once differentiation of self and attachment styles have been identified, the primary goal of this thesis is to help a couple increase their levels of differentiation of self and practice a more secure attachment style within their marriage through the use of EFCT.* A secondary goal of this thesis is to help each spousal couple increase differentiation of self with their workplace teams and to practice a more secure attachment style with those teams.

According to Bowen (1978), the couple's differentiation of self can only be increased through the encountering of crisis or a crucible moment. Shults and Sandage (2006) adapted Schnarch's (1997) model of couple transformation and developed a model of spiritual seeking and dwelling that explained the necessity of crisis or crucible moment in spiritual development. The couple within the case study, David and Missy, will face such a crisis or crucible through pregnancy and a decision to pursue a seminary education in another state.<sup>1</sup> David and Missy's story is similar to Pete and Traci's fictional story in that both couples are newlyweds with at least one spouse feeling called to ministry. The author's hypothesis is that David and Missy's overall differentiation of self will increase if the crucible is used as a catalyst to identify, confess, and repent from patterns of generational sin and the labeling of a family member as identified patient. If

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect the participants' identities.

identification, confession, and repentance are practiced, the result will also be the couple practicing a more secure attachment style.

The concepts of confession and repentance are deeply biblical. We will now transition to a clear articulation of a theology of the family.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAMILY

In the glorious beginning, when God's majestic ability to create was on display, God saved his most glorious creation for last; the first family (Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:21-25).<sup>1</sup> God ordained the first family with certain responsibilities; to be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the fish and the birds and "every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28). By empowering the first family with so many responsibilities, God placed them front and center in the Biblical narrative. The concept of family continued to play a major role in the Biblical narrative from the blessing of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) to Jesus' first miracle at a wedding (John 2:1-11) and continued through to the last wedding that shall ever take place; the marriage of New Jerusalem and the Lamb (Revelation 21:2; 9-14).<sup>2</sup> Due to the family's paramount role in Scripture, it is of the utmost importance that a Biblical theology of the family be clearly articulated.

#### **Covenant Union**

Genesis 2:7 stated, "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Genesis 2:18 explained that it was not good for the man to be alone. God saw a need for the man to have a helper. Therefore, "God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep" and made woman from "the rib he had taken out of the man" (Genesis 2:21a; 22a). So important was the creation of a helper for the man that God waited to call creation good until after

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

<sup>2</sup> This author was first introduced to the idea of marriage as present in the beginning, middle, and end of the Biblical narrative by John and Staci Eldredge (2011).

he created woman (Compare Genesis 2:18 when God declared that it was not good for man to be alone and Genesis 1:31 when God declared all good after his work on the sixth day).

God ordained that the first man and first woman should enter into a covenant union with one another and “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The covenant union was to be of primary importance in the lives of the first husband and wife so much that the man was to leave his father and mother. The new oneness of the covenant union was to be the most important relationship for either couple. The Torah placed such an emphasis upon the new oneness of a marital union that it stated that a newly married man was to stay at home the first year of his marriage in order to “bring happiness to the wife he has married” (Deuteronomy 24:5).

The first covenant union was given responsibilities that included procreation (Genesis 1:28). The first union originally experienced no shame (Genesis 2:25). The result of no shame being present in marriage increased the likelihood that sexual intercourse was appropriately sensual (Proverbs 5:19; Song of Songs 4:16), playful (Proverbs 5:18-19), and even obedient. The fulfillment of God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” from Genesis 1:28 indicates that sexual union was and is an act of obedience to God’s command to procreate.

### **Equal Yet Distinct**

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). The words of Genesis 1:27 detailed the reality that both the first husband and wife reflected an image of their Creator. The importance

of such a reflection is that both the husband and wife shared equal amounts of God's image. There was no hierarchy present in the Garden of Eden based on biology or gender.

However, equality in reflecting God's image and the lack of hierarchy did not erase the distinct differences between the first husband and first wife. Genesis stated that God made one male and one female. Jesus re-emphasized the distinct differences between the first male and female when he quoted Genesis 1:27 in Matthew 19. One of the major purposes for the distinct differences between the first husband and wife was so that they could become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Genesis 2:24 most likely could be applied in a few different ways; "one flesh" meaning one family unit, "one flesh" meaning sexual union, and "one flesh" reminding the reader of the creation of Eve in which she was created from the one flesh of Adam.

Eggerichs (2004) suggested an important difference between a husband and wife by emphasizing the words in Ephesians 5:33, "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Eggerichs indicated that a profound difference between a husband and wife is that a husband, above all, desires respect. And, a wife, above all, desires love. The different desires indicated by Ephesians and highlighted by Eggerichs are examples of the distinct differences between men and women.

As equality and distinct differences played out within the first marriage, Scripture described the first marriage as lacking shame (Genesis 1:25). Adam and Eve were able to be in a covenant union with one another that gloriously displayed their equality and differences. Marital discord and conflict did not enter into the first union until after sin entered into the world. It will be emphasized later that, due to Christ's death on the Cross,

the redeeming power of the Cross can work within a marriage to reclaim the perfect equality and distinctiveness that was lost in Eden.

### **Pauline Commentary on Marriage**

The Apostle Paul provided a God-inspired first century commentary on the equal yet distinct creation of man and woman. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1-2, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Paul’s command to all Christ-followers was to love as Christ loved and sacrificed. Paul later wrote that all Christ-followers are to “submit to one another out of reference for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). It is important to point out that Paul emphasized the need to love as Christ loved and submit to one another before stating the influential words of Ephesians 5:22-33. In order to properly exegete the description of service, love, and sacrifice described in Ephesians 5:22-33, that same passage must be viewed within the entire context of Ephesians 5.

Paul did write that wives are supposed to submit to their husbands, but only after he commanded all Christians to submit to one another. A wife’s submission to her husband’s leadership is part of the larger call to love and submit to one another. Paul also stated “Husbands, love our wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul’s command for husbands to love their wives was made only after he called all Christians to live a life of love. A husband’s call to love his wife is part of the larger call to love and submit to one another.

Therefore, the mutual call to love and submit from verses 1 and 21 of Ephesians 5

did not indicate a hierarchy resulting in a complimentary view of marriage. Instead, the shared responsibility of submission and love shows that both a husband and wife are to both submit and love within a marriage. Creation and the Garden of Eden provided a perfect picture of an equalitarian relationship founded on love and submission. Adam and Eve were able to rule the earth without any apparent presence of sin. However, that soon changed.

### **Sin Enters Marriage**

Genesis 3:1 indicated that the serpent tempted Eve with the question, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” After a brief dialogue infused with multiple lies from the serpent, Genesis 3:6 stated that the woman “saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye...she took some and ate it.” Immediately upon Eve’s eating of the fruit, sin and disobedience entered the world because Eve disobeyed God’s command found in Genesis 2:16-17. After eating the fruit, Eve gave some of the fruit to Adam and he also ate the fruit. The result was that Adam also participated in disobedient and sinful actions. The heartbreaking and overwhelming result due to their disobedience and sin was that the goodness that was present in the Garden of Eden prior to their actions was no longer present. Sin had entered the world and sin immediately started to affect the marriage of Adam and Eve.

The first result of Adam and Eve’s sinful action was that both experienced shame and a desire to hide. Genesis 3:7 indicated that they experienced shame with one another after realizing they were naked. They responded by hiding their bodies from one another. Adam and Eve could no longer be naked and feel no shame; an undoing of Genesis 1:25.

Also, Scripture indicated that Adam and Eve also felt a need to hide from God. After being sought out by God, “Where are you,” Adam responded, “I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:10). Devastatingly, Adam and Eve’s sin and disobedience not only caused the first husband and wife to hide from one another, but to also hide from their Creator.

The second result of Adam and Eve’s sinful action was the first projection of blame within a family. After being confronted by God about his own sin, Adam blamed the situation on Eve by stating, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree” (Genesis 3:12). A terrible spiral had occurred very quickly; Adam and Eve went from everything being good and feeling no shame to Adam projecting blame onto Eve. The Lord then confronted Eve and she also projected blame, but she did so towards the serpent and not towards Adam.

Another result of Adam and Eve’s sin was the entrance of pain into the world. The Lord told Eve, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children” (Genesis 3:16). The Lord told Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:17). The painless perfect existence in the Garden of Eden had been lost.

The last two immediate results of the Fall were a loss of equality within the first marriage and the entrance of death into the world. Genesis 3:16 said, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Eve no longer enjoyed equality with Adam because he was now the ruler of the household. And, sadly, eternal life had been lost. The Lord told Adam, “You will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19). The

foreshadowing of the ultimate pain of death was Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). While physically alive, they had lost the presence of God.

### **Sin and the Family**

The effects of sin present within the first marriage were passed onto Adam and Eve's children; Cain and Abel. After God accepted Abel's sacrifice over Cain's sacrifice, Cain experienced anger and disappointment. Cain responded to the anger and disappointment by enticing Abel into a field where Cain, "Attacked his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:8). The effects of the original sin displayed through Cain's actions resulted in two very similar outcomes for Cain.

Cain, like his parents, had a confrontational dialogue with God. God's words in Genesis 4:9 to Cain, "Where is your brother" were similar to what he asked Adam in Genesis 3:9, "Where are you?" Cain also experienced banishment similar to the banishment experienced by Adam and Eve. The Lord "banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken" (Genesis 3:23). The Lord told Cain, "You will be a restless wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:12b). Cain responded by saying, "Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden for your presence" (Genesis 4:14a). Both the confrontational dialogue and banishment, indicated a spatial separation from God that was not present in the beginning.

## **The Cross and Marriage**

Paul wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith his blood” (Romans 3:23-25a). Adam and Eve were the first to sin and fall short of the glory of God. And, as indicated above, their sin had tremendous effects on their marriage.

Thankfully, according to Paul’s words in the book of Romans, Christ’s death on the Cross atones for sin, including sins that are exhibited within marriage. Paul also wrote, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The ministry of Christ’s reconciling work also applies to marriage and families. God was reconciling all things to himself, including sinful marriages and families. The sin that was present in the Garden of Eden and that continues to be present within families today was forgiven on the Cross. The reconciling work of the Cross, if claimed by families and individuals within families, can overcome shame, overpower the projection of blame, ease the pain of relationships, and reestablish Eden-like equality within a marriage and family.

The Cross provides the means and power to redeem marriages and families back towards Eden. The tools to partner with Christ in obtaining and proclaiming such redemption are confession and forgiveness. When marriages and families practice confession and forgiveness within marriage, hints of Eden creatively appear.

## **Confession and Forgiveness Within Marriage**

As Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray, he modeled the following, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12). Through the words of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus indicated to his disciples that there was a direct connection between being forgiven and forgiving. This author does not believe that Jesus was indicating that receiving his forgiveness was contingent upon forgiving others, but that he was intimating that being forgiven leads to the practice of forgiving. Jesus believed so much in forgiveness that he told Peter to forgive his brother “seventy-seven times” (Matt 18:22).

The connection between being forgiven and forgiving extends into marriage. A marital dyad is to work to forgive each other just as they have been forgiven by Christ. However, before a spouse can forgive another spouse, there must be a willingness to confess any sin that requires forgiveness. James wrote that we are to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). According to James, confession is directly linked to healing. It is the belief of this author that confessing our sins to one another within marriage can lead to both individual and marital healing.

Unconfessed sin remains hidden sin. Confession is the practice of bringing hidden sin into the light. John wrote, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:5). The light of Christ’s forgiveness overcomes the darkness of sin. Confession to Christ leads to being forgiven by him. First John 1:9 (English Standard Version) declared, “If we confess our sin, he [Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If we confess our sins to Christ, he is

faithful and will forgive us of our sins.

In relationships, especially within a marriage, we are to model the forgiveness of Christ. When we confess to a spouse, we are bringing sin into the light of a marriage and we empower our spouse to practice the forgiveness of Christ. Once a spouse confesses to their spouse, the other spouse has the opportunity to practice loving forgiveness. Loving forgiveness, according to Peter, covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). To summarize:

**Confession to a spouse + being forgiven by the spouse = Love covering  
sin within marriage**

Within marriage, the loving, overcoming, and healing of sin is possible due to confession and forgiveness. Again, James wrote, “Confess your sins to one another . . . that you may be healed” (James 5:16 English Standard Version).

### **Revisiting Eden**

A person can only conjecture what would have happened in the Garden of Eden if Adam and Eve had practiced confession and forgiveness after they disobeyed and sinned. Thankfully, God has a plan to redeem the world, including marriages and families, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because of Jesus’ sacrificial actions, Eden will be revisited one day and the concept of family will once again be very present. In the book of Revelation, John proclaimed, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). The idea of perfect marital union, which was lost in Eden, will be fully redeemed when God makes everything new.

The same power that raised Christ from the dead and that will make Revelation

21:2 a reality, currently lives in us. Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20a). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the pastor, therapist, counselor, and friend to embody the power of Christ as we partner with our clients and partners in the efforts to rescue marriages and families. We now turn to a literature review that will provide integrative support for the marriage of a Biblical theology of the family and therapeutic theory.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Bowen (1978) believed that, “People pick spouses who have the same levels of differentiation” (p. 377). Higher levels of differentiation within a family system would result in a marital couple engaging in dialogue and decision making that is logic-driven and low on emotion. Low levels of differentiation within a family system would result in a marital couple engaging in dialogue and decision making that is driven by emotion and little objective fact. Couples with high levels of differentiation would experience little anxiety and couples with low levels of differentiation would experience much anxiety. Such theoretical knowledge is encouraging for highly differentiated couples, but discouraging for lowly differentiated couples.

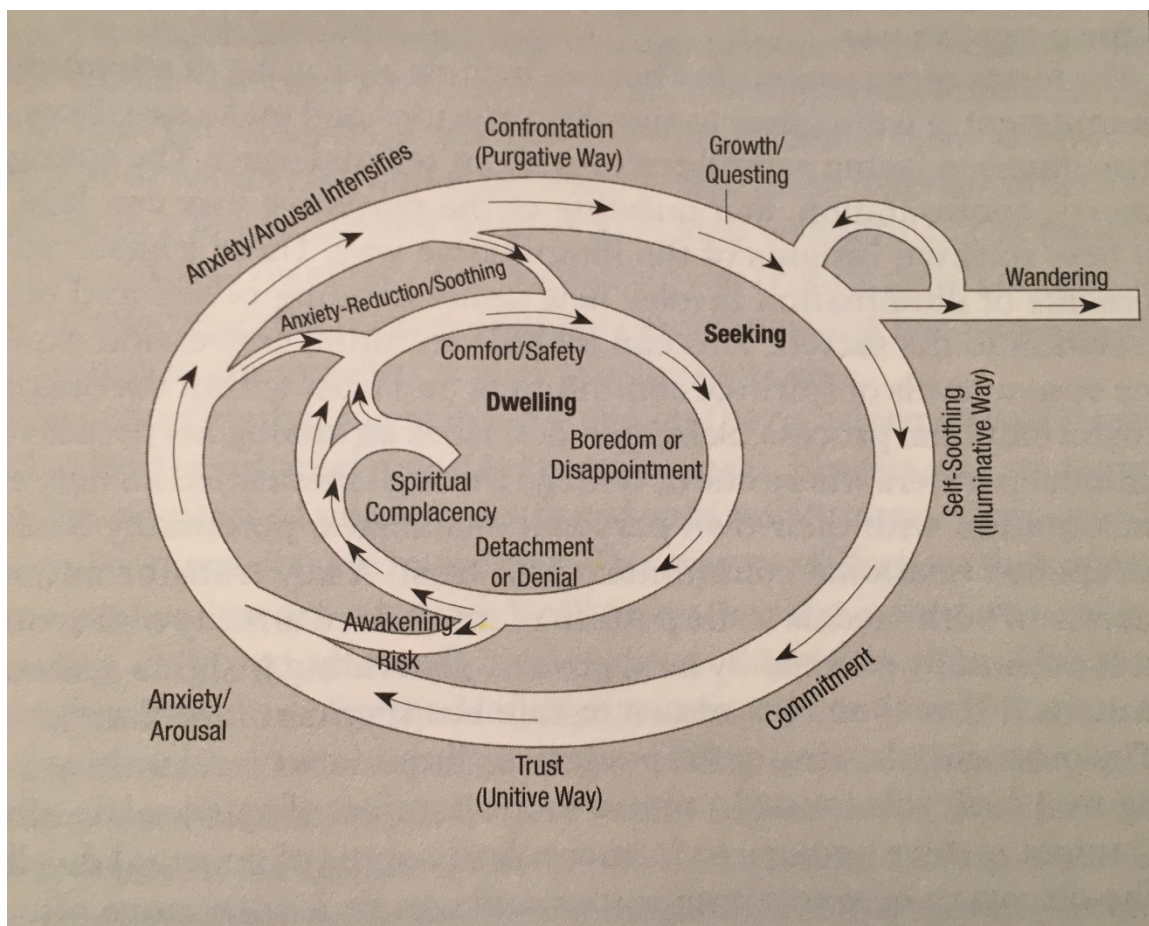
How could a lowly differentiated couple overcome their low levels of differentiation and create a family system that experienced lower levels of systemic anxiety? Marital crucibles that result in practicing confession and forgiveness are of paramount importance.

***Crucible Seasons of Confessing and Forgiveness.*** In his book, *Passionate Marriage*, Schnarch (1997) applied the idea of marital crucible to sexual growth. He also created what he called a “mental map” for the marital crucible, the “Regulating Growth and Stability” map (p. 355). The map introduced two cycles to the process of marital growth: the comfort/safety cycle and the growth cycle (p. 355). Schnarch described the comfort/safety cycle as “avoiding anxiety and emphasizing comfort and safety [which] leads to low sexual desire, lack of intimacy, and withdrawal from your partner” (p. 356).

Schnarch emphasized the necessity of couples entering the growth cycle in what he described as a “leap of faith, because real safety follows rather than precedes your first trip through the growth cycle” (p. 358). In other words, Schnarch was stating his belief that marriages cannot truly experience relational safety unless they risk entering into an anxiety/arousal-laden growth cycle, also known as a crucible.

F. Leron Shults and Steven Sandage (2006) built upon Schnarch’s (1997) sexual crucible model in their book titled *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. Shults and Sandage put forth a model that described both the theological and spiritual necessity to encounter systemic anxiety in order to grow in faith and increase differentiation of self. Shults and Sandage’s model is used in this thesis to explain why two different crises faced by the case study couple will lead to a healthier marriage, if handled in a healthy way by the couple.

Like Schnarch’s (1997) model, Shults and Sandage’s (2006) model emphasized two different cycles of spiritual formation, “seeking and dwelling” (p. 32). The inner cycle, known as the dwelling phase, contained the stages of comfort/safety, boredom or disappointment, detachment or denial, and spiritual complacency. The outer cycle, known as the seeking phase, contained the stages of anxiety/arousal, anxiety/arousal intensification, confrontation, growth/questing, self-soothing, commitment, and growth. Shults and Sandage expanded on Schnarch’s original terminology by including the spiritual ways known as the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way in the outer growth cycle (See Figure 1 for Shults and Sandage’s model).



**Figure 1. Balancing Spiritual Dwelling and Seeking**

According to Shults and Sandage (2006), the dwelling stage is marked with a “relating to the sacred in ways that feel familiar, comfortable, and safe” (p. 32). While safety abounds, Shults and Sandage also stated that the dwelling stage could lead to spiritual practices being too “predictable or lacking in the vitality necessary for certain developmental challenges” (p. 32). A person experiencing the detachment or denial stage of the dwelling cycle could experience an awakening that leads to risk taking. The awakening and risk taking results in a person entering into the seeking cycle.

The seeking cycle starts immediately with anxiety and arousal. The anxiety is due to the loss of the homeostatic dwelling cycle. A person in the seeking cycle can choose to

embrace the anxiety and enter into the confrontation stage. If a person finds the anxiety too intense, he or she can reenter the dwelling stage through anxiety reduction and soothing. Shults and Sandage (2006) wrote, “If a person’s desire for comfort and safety exceeds their motivation to tolerate the intensified anxiety of seeking, they might opt for a return to familiar forms of spiritual dwelling” (p. 33).

However, if a person embraces the next stage in the seeking cycle, the confrontation stage, he or she would experience purgation through “courage, honesty, confrontation, and questing” (Shults & Sandage, 2006, p. 34). In the confrontation stage, a person would experience “new understanding of self and the sacred” that could have never been developed within the dwelling cycle (p. 34). The confrontation stage challenges a person to either move on to self-soothing/the illuminative way or escape the spiritual transformation process through wandering.

If a person continues to embrace the seeking cycle, that person would experience greater levels of commitment and trust, entering into the unitive way. After greater trust is developed, a person could then re-enter the dwelling stage. Shults and Sandage (2006) wrote, “Spiritual dwelling after a growth cycle can involve new levels of spiritual maturity with less use of rigid defenses against insecurity, questions, and conflict” (p. 34).

Shults and Sandage’s (2006) spiritual transformation model has a strong connection to both BFST and AT. For instance, Bowen (1978) most likely would have determined that the anxiety and arousal of the seeking stage was a result in the loss of homeostasis found in the dwelling stage. Bowen also would have most likely agreed with Shults and Sandage regarding the necessity of a seeking cycle, or crucible, to increase the levels of

differentiation within a marriage. Bowlby (1988) most likely would have viewed the newer levels of spiritual maturity, described by Shults and Sandage to be a result of the seeking cycle, as a means to a more secure attachment within a marriage. Shults and Sandage wrote regarding both BFST and AT, “Relational attachments become more and more secure and intentional and less anxiety driven. Like Schnarch (1997), we suggest that spiritually transformed persons should develop a more differentiated sense of self” (p. 34).

While Shults and Sandage’s (2006) model was developed in an effort to both describe and explain spiritual transformation, it can be applied to the process of a transformed marriage. Schnarch (1997) did apply such a model to marriage, but with a focus on sex. This author believes that the dwelling and seeking model of transformation can be used to help a couple understand that their marriage will oscillate between times of comfortable dwelling and anxiety-arousing, yet necessary, seeking. As a result, Shults and Sandage’s adapted model from Schnarch could be used to help couples understand that their greatest growth as a couple will come through experiencing seasons in life that resemble the seeking cycle. In essence, couples should be taught that they cannot grow in both differentiation and attachment unless they experience seasons of crucible growth.

How does a couple navigate a crucible if during the crucible one or both spouses realize that they have harmed the other? At some point early in a marriage, spouses will find themselves with opportunities to confess to and forgive their partner. This author encourages you to read chapter in order to understand the practice and power of confession. Regarding forgiveness, there could be two challenges to the partner who needs to forgive. First, they may have never been taught the necessity to practice

forgiveness. Second, they may not know how to forgive, especially a severe offense.

There could be two challenges to the partner who needs to confess. The confessing partner might have a misunderstanding of the practice of confession and they most likely will fear the offended spouse's response. Practicing forgiveness is first addressed below followed by practicing confession.

***Practicing Forgiveness.*** Worthington's (2003) *Forgiving and Reconciling* provided a blueprint to learn both the necessity of forgiveness and the practice of forgiveness.

After the murder of his mother, Worthington spoke, "I'd like to have him alone in a room with a baseball bat for thirty minutes. I'd beat his brains out" (p. 18) He also questioned, "Can I ever forgive this?" (p. 19). Worthington was wrestling with wanting and being able to forgive the perpetrator who murdered his mother. In marriage, if an offense is severe enough, the offended spouse might say something as strong as Worthington's words or ask the same questions Worthington asked, but in regards to forgiving the perpetrating spouse.

Worthington (2003) would go on to write that forgiveness "doesn't deny the pain of a true loss. In fact, forgiveness works hand in glove with grieving to help resolve grief faster and more thoroughly" (p. 21). Worthington was, in essence, saying that forgiveness is necessary and to not forgive slows down the pain of healing. In marriage, if a spouse withholds forgiveness, that spouse is delaying any opportunity of a marriage healing.

After stating the necessity of forgiveness, Worthington (2003) explained his REACH model of forgiveness. REACH is an acrostic for Worthington's five steps of forgiveness: recall the hurt, empathize, altruistic gift of forgiveness, commit publicly to forgive, and hold on to forgiveness.

- Recall the hurt—“To heal, we must recall the hurt as objectively as we can” (p. 73).
- Empathize—“Empathy is seeing things from another person’s point of view. To forgive, try to feel the transgressor’s feelings” (p. 74).
- Altruistic gift of forgiveness—“Consider how you felt when you were forgiven. When you remember who you felt, you might be willing to give a selfless give of forgiveness to those who hurt you” (p. 74).
- Commit publicly to forgive—“If you make your forgiveness public, you are less likely to doubt it later” (p. 74).
- Hold onto forgiveness—“When you doubt whether you have forgiven, there are many ways to stop forgiveness from slipping” (p. 74).

In connection with Shults and Sandage (2006), an offense committed within a marriage can lead to a season of anxiety and arousal where a marriage must be evaluated. Worthington (2003) would most likely state that the offense cannot be healed and the marriage redeemed unless confession and forgiveness are experienced. Confession and forgiveness within marriage could possibly mirror the confrontation and self-soothing stages of the seeking cycles, which means that a marriage could experience greater levels of commitment and trust through practices of confession and forgiveness.

***Practicing Confession and Forgiveness in a Therapeutic Setting.*** What could a therapist or pastoral counselor do when a spouse starts to confess a marital offense to their partner and deep emotions formally withheld within the marriage are expressed? The emotions expressed could be from the confessing partner or from the offended

partner. As referenced above, Johnson (2004) provided ways to help such a couple in *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy*, through the description of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy.

Johnson's (2004) book and theory are directly related to Attachment Theory. Johnson wrote, "A major goal of effective couple therapy has to be to address attachment concerns, reduce attachment insecurities, and foster the creation of a secure bond" (p. 39). The ultimate goal of EFCT is to lead couples to more secure bonds. Johnson believed that more secure attachment takes place through the identification, sharing, and understanding of emotions. She described such a process using the metaphor of dancing. Again, Johnson stated, "Emotion is then the music in the dance of adult intimacy. When we change the music—we change the dance" (p. 67).

Johnson (2004) described three tasks of an EFCT therapist: foster a therapeutic alliance, help a couple access and reformulate emotion, and assist a couple in the restructuring of couple interaction. Regarding the establishment of an alliance, Johnson stated that a therapist needed to practice the skills of empathic attunement, acceptance, genuineness, active monitoring, and joining the system. Empathic attunement means a therapist must constantly strive to understand a person in his or her context. Active monitoring is necessary in order to avoid ruptures in the therapist-client alliance. As you will see below in chapter five, the author of this thesis employed the three tasks of EFCT to help the case study couple increase differentiation and improve secure attachment.

In an effort to help couples access and reformulate emotion, a therapist must help a couple first identify their emotions. As a reminder, Johnson (2004) listed eight primary emotions that couples need to be able to access and share: excitement, joy, surprise,

distress, disgust, anger, shame, and fear (p. 64). If couples are able to express these emotions, a “new and/or expanded emotional experience then allows for a reorganization of the interactional positions partners take with one another” (p. 63).

Johnson (2004) pointed out that a couple not only needs to be able to share emotion but also must work on the skills of listening and empathizing in order to restructure interaction. Johnson would call this process the turning of a new emotional experience into a new response to the partner. In other words, once a spouse has shared their emotions, the receiving spouse can restructure their response due to a greater level of empathy and understanding. Healthier emotional responses result in choreographing of change events. To use Johnson’s metaphor, if choreographed change events are experienced, the emotional dance of a marriage greatly improves.

Again, to use Shults and Sandage’s (2006) model, the access and reformulating of emotion would most likely take place in the confrontation stage of the seeking cycle. The restructuring of emotional interactions would occur in the self-soothing and commitment stages. If greater emotional sharing and understanding occur, the step would be a great increase in secure attachment and differentiation. Dance partners can become good dance partners only if they securely trust their partner to know and execute the next move and be differentiated enough to respond in kind.

***Assessing Increased Differentiation and Healthier Attachment.*** How does a spouse know if their marital emotional dance is improving? Couples who are increasing in differentiation within their marriage as a result of crucible seasons of confession and forgiveness would know that their emotional dance is improving through decreased systemic stress. Couples with declining differentiation within their marriage as a result of

crucible seasons would know their emotional dance is deteriorating through increased systemic stress. Bowen (1978) introduced the key tenet of his theory when he wrote that families exist within nuclear family emotional systems. He stated that anxiety had a tendency to be transmitted throughout a nuclear family emotional system, especially if those within the system had low levels of differentiation of self. Bowen stated that all peoples exist on a differentiation of self scale that ranges from 0 to 100. Regarding differentiation of self, Bowen wrote, “Lower scale people are more vulnerable to stress and, for them, recovery from symptoms can be slow or impossible while higher scale people tend to recover rapidly” (p. 472).

There are certain fundamentals to dancing and these fundamentals can be measured based upon performance. When created, Bowen’s differentiation of self scale lacked an empirically valid way to measure differentiation. Elizabeth Skowron and Myrna Friedlander (1998) developed the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI) and published an article titled “The Differentiation of Self Inventory: Development and Initial Validation.” Skowron later published an article with Thomas Schmitt (2003) titled “Assessing Interpersonal Fusion: Reliability and Validity of a New DSI Fusion with Others Subscale.” Skowron and Friedlander’s article is of extreme importance because the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R) is an empirically developed assessment that helps a therapist, counselor, or pastor assess a client’s or parishioner’s level on the Differentiation of Self scale. As stated above, Bowen introduced the scale in *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, but prior to the creation of the Differentiation of Self Inventory, a therapist would have had to determine a person’s level of differentiation through observation alone. Skowron and Friedlander’s inventory can be used to assess a

client at the beginning of treatment and provide a therapist, counselor, or pastor with a client's baseline of differentiation.

The original Differentiation of Self Inventory contained four subscales: Emotional Reactivity, I-Position, Emotional Cutoff, and Fusion with Others. Skowron and Schmitt's (1998) article detailed a weakness in the original DSI's Fusion with Others subscale and introduced the DSI-R as a more empirically valid tool. This author would not suggest the use of the original DSI but would instead support the use of the DSI-R. The DSI-R contains forty six assessment questions with a majority of the questions requiring a reverse scoring. The majority of the subscale for I-Position *does not* require reverse scoring. If a clinician or pastor desires to use the DSI-R, Skowron and Schmitt provided a detailed assessment guide at the end of their article.

We will now transition to an actual case study that applies the theoretical and biblical ideas above to a young couple that were recently married. As we transition, this author would like to remind the reader of the main purpose of this thesis; *to help a couple increase their levels of differentiation of self and practice a more secure attachment style within their marriage through the use of EFCT.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FAMILY ASSESSMENT

The client for this assessment is a married couple. They have been married for two years, are expecting a child, and are considering a move for educational and vocational purposes. The husband, David, is a 22-year-old Caucasian male.<sup>1</sup> David agreed to participate in this assessment in order to enhance marital quality and discern how to increase his leadership efficacy. Assessment instruments administered to David were the Keirsey Temperament Sorter II (KTS-II; Kersey, 1988), the Differentiation of Self Inventory Revised (DSI-R; Skowron & Schmidt, 2003), and the Gallup StrengthsFinder (GSF; Rath, 2007). In addition, a genogram was also constructed for David as part of this project (see Appendix A for David's genogram). All assessments were administered on January 25, 2015, and were reported on January 25, 2015. The clinician was Reverend Paul Gibson, a doctoral student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

The wife, Missy, is a 22-year-old Caucasian female. Missy agreed to participate in this assessment in order to enhance marital quality. Assessment instruments administered to Missy were the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Briggs & Myers, 1943), the Differentiation of Self Inventory Revised (DSI-R), and the Gallup StrengthsFinder (GSF).<sup>2</sup> In addition, a genogram was also constructed for Missy as part of this project (see Appendix A for Missy's genogram). The DSI-R was administered on January 25, 2015, the GSF on October 23, 2015, and the MBTI on January 3, 2016. (The

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect participants' identities.

<sup>2</sup> The clinician was able to obtain the ability to clinically assess Missy with the MBTI after assessing David with the KTS-II.

gap between the administration of Missy's DSI-R, GSF, and MBTI were all due to geographical distance and scheduling.) The results were reported on January 18, 2016. The clinician for the DSI-R and GSF was Reverend Paul Gibson, a doctoral student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The clinician for the MBTI was Certified Life Coach, Georgia Shaffer.

### **Introduction and Background of David**

**Family History.** David's family or origin is intact (see Appendix A for David's genogram). David's father, Steve, is a 60-year-old self-employed entrepreneur. Steve currently owns a painting company after approximately two decades of serving in the restaurant industry as a high-level manager/store operator. Steve has been diagnosed with diabetes and has no known mental health diagnosis. David's mother, Sheila, is a 50-year-old office manager who has alternated between working inside and outside of the home. Sheila has no known history of physical or mental health diagnosis. Steve and Sheila have been married for 32 years.

David is the middle child of three. David's sister, Karen, is a 30-year-old work supervisor at an insurance company. Karen has been married for 6 years to Craig, and they have one child, Lucia. Karen has no known history of physical or mental health diagnosis. Karen, Craig, and Lucia reside out of state. David's brother, Tyson, is a 19-year-old freshman at a local university where he recently joined a fraternity. David's brother has no known history of physical or mental health diagnosis.

David's family of origin displays relationship styles that include discord, conflict, harmony, love, admiration, and friendship (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero

& Bird, 2003). David's parents appear to practice a harmonious relationship style with the family system's homeostasis dependent upon the client's father being in control. According to David (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015), his mother is "very submissive" to a husband who is "all ruling." Clinton and Sibcy (2006; 2014) would classify persons like David's father with an avoidant attachment style within the marital dyad. The presentation of the avoidant attachment style might be due to their overinflated view of self and low view of others' trustworthiness. Persons like David's mother would be classified with a secure attachment because they show a full range of affect, are comfortable with closeness, and are willing to commit (Clinton & Sibcy, 2006; 2014; Johnson, 2004).

Father-son dyads similar to that of David and his father will function with a relationship style characterized by discord and conflict (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). Describing the relationship in its child and adolescent stages, David stated that he and his father "buted heads," feeling like he "always had to please him" (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David and his father would attempt to bond through sports, but even this possible bonding activity seemed difficult because of the driven nature of David's father. Furthermore, David's father showed little physical and verbal affection to his son. Positively, David felt provided for by his father and embraces the fact that he was taught persistence and drive through the father-son dyad. In general, David desired and still desires acceptance from his father, who "loves to play devil's advocate" (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015).

The mother-son dyad of David and his mother could be identified as a

relationship style full of love and affection (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). David described his mother as “loving, caring, kind, nurturing, and encouraging” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David stated that his mother played a significant role in his faith development, saying, “She was the only member of the family I saw read the Bible” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). The mother-son dyad appeared to be a haven of acceptance and peace, contrasting and providing a relief from the conflict between David and his father.

David’s relationship with his sister is similar to sibling dyads that could be described as loving with one sibling admiring the other sibling (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero and Bird, 2003). For David, it appears as if he admires his sister and desires her approval, although not as strongly as he desires his father’s approval. He stated that his sister was a “good mix of both parents, very intelligent,” and that he “always wanted to make her laugh” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David’s sister was also part caretaker for the client: “She’s always been like a baby-sitter” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015).

David’s relationship with his brother could be depicted as harmonious (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero and Bird, 2003). David indicated that he loves “to support my brother” and that his brother “looks up to me” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David also appears to admire his brother, although he is the younger sibling. David stated that his brother “knows how to work the system,” and David appears to desire this trait due to his brother’s ability to avoid conflict with their father (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015).

David and Missy recently married. David and Missy practice a relationship style

that would be similar to dyads that present as both loving and conflicting (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero and Bird, 2003). Presenting challenges for the couple are addressed below.

**Observations.** David presents with comfortable posture, an affirming smile, and continuous eye contact at the beginning of a session. David's demeanor changes when discussing his father. David then looks down and his shoulders start to slump. David displays the emotions of excitement and confusion when addressing his new marriage. David's face lights up with vibrant displays of passion when describing his faith.

David strongly feels called to a life in vocational ministry. David desires for his vocational calling to provide a safe and stable home for his family. David emphasizes his faith over his calling but also understands that his calling cannot be separated from his faith. As a vocational minister, David would be continuing his paternal grandfather's legacy.

**Influential Events.** David identified four key influential events from his past. The first event identified was his baptism at the age of six. David stated that his baptism was important because it helped him understand what it meant to be in a relationship with God. While discussing his baptism, David indicated that his dad was not present due to a business trip.

The second important event identified by David was a little league baseball championship at the age of 12. David stated that the baseball championship provided him a sense of accomplishment and "helped me believe I had the ability to play" (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). Such a sense of accomplishment was important to David because he self-identified that he struggled with self-confidence.

The third important event identified by David was a relational breakup that occurred during his sophomore year of college. He stated that the breakup “forced me to work through stuff,” including learning how to practice transformational forgiveness (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David said that he was “way too overly invested in the relationship” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015).

The final event identified by David as important was his recent wedding. He stated that the engagement and wedding set his life on a “whole new trajectory” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). David believes the marriage was a “blessing from God” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015).

**Developmental History.** David presented with no known developmental delays as a child. David did present with minor disruptive classroom behavior while in high school. Due to the disruptive behavior, he was placed on medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The prescription was taken for one year and there were no indications that the medication positively or negatively affected David’s behavior.

**Social History.** David presented with normal social functioning as a child and adolescent. However, his interactions with peers were limited due to his father only allowing “one friend per week over” (D. Smith, personal communication, February 02, 2015). Due to limited social interaction, David did not date until later in high school. As noted above, he later experienced a breakup with his girlfriend that caused significant emotional distress. David also had a fear of public speaking as an adolescent.

**Educational History.** David was an honor student throughout both elementary school and secondary school. David recently finished his bachelor of arts degree in communications. He is also currently vetting multiple evangelical seminaries in order to decide where to pursue a master of divinity. David's primary strengths are leadership, caring for others, and the formulation of strategy (Rath, 2007). David knows these are strengths due to affirmation from Missy, mentors, and the results of the Gallup StrengthsFinder test (GSF).

**Medical History.** David had no known medical issues as a child, adolescent or adult.

**Psychiatric History.** David was diagnosed with ADHD as a high school sophomore. He experienced a brief time of counseling in order to prepare for taking the ADHD medication. He also felt compelled to view pornography daily between the ages of ten and twenty. David stated that he would view pornography and masturbate at least once per day. David's pornography use affected his initial ability to attach to Missy. David's confession of pornography use to Missy would be a crucible moment for their marriage as indicated below.

Recently, a situational phobia of choking associated with eating has manifested in David. He has reduced his daily diet to only a few foods he trusts to not cause choking. David has made an effort to start psychotherapy in order to understand the situational phobia. Prior to marriage, David and Missy participated in a six-week premarital counseling process.

## **Mental Status of David**

**Appearance and Behavior.** David always appeared on time and in a positive mood for each session. His clothing was clean and weather appropriate. He maintained a relaxed posture except for the times he discussed his father. David would then grow tense, furrow his brow, and slump his shoulders. He embraced the assessment process as evidenced by follow-up questions asked by the client towards the counselor during the interview sessions.

**Cognitive Functioning.** David's thinking processes were organized, methodical, and focused on thematic concepts. His reasoning was a mixture of concrete and abstract processes, driven by the values of inclusion and harmony (Berk, 2010). David's perception of situations was reality-based and normal for his age. His judgment could be compromised by his fear of disrupting the harmony or equilibrium of a situation. He had no short-term or long-term difficulties with memory and was an enthusiastic learner.

David displayed a stable state of being with a positive emotional tone. He did present with anxiety when discussing self-worth, faith, and his relationship with his father. The anxiety did not initially appear overwhelming or persistent as the client never lost the ability to function physically, socially, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. However, a phobia of choking eventually limited his desire to eat. His orientation was always current and appropriate to the situation. There was never any suicidal or homicidal ideation either past or present.

## **Introduction and Background of Missy**

Missy's family of origin is intact (see Appendix A for Missy's genogram). Her father, Mike, is a 60-year-old building inspector. Prior to serving as a building inspector, Missy's father worked in the furniture business for six years and as a homebuilder for over fifteen years. According to Missy (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015), her father experienced a very difficult vocational season while partnering with his brother in the furniture industry. Missy's father was a smoker and has been diagnosed with different levels of severity of depression throughout his life.

Missy's mother, Susan, is a 56-year-old schoolteacher of 24 years. Missy's mother took a vocational break for seven years in order to be a stay-at-home mother to rear client and her siblings. Her mother is a nationally board certified teacher. Missy's mother has no known history of physical or mental health diagnosis. Missy's father and mother have been married for 34 years.

Missy is the middle of three children. Her brother, Patrick, is a 26-year-old accountant. Missy's brother is not married but is currently in a dating relationship. Her brother has no known history of physical or mental illness. Missy's sister, Ella, is a 21-year-old college athlete who recently transferred colleges. Her sister is currently single. Her sister has recently been diagnosed with Anorexia.

Missy's family of origin consists of relationship styles that include cutoff, estrangement, distance, hostility, and close friendship (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). According to the Missy (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015), her parents displayed a relationship style that was cut off and estranged when the client was younger. She indicated that her parents did not

show much affection to each other and described their relationship as a “functional parenting relationship” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). Missy stated that her father spent many nights on the couch. Her father hid major financial issues from her mother, which resulted in increased estrangement and cutoff. The client’s parents’ relationship system has transitioned to one described as much more harmonious since the client and her siblings have moved out. Missy attributes the improved harmonious relationships to her parents’ church attendance and involvement.

As a child and adolescent, the father-daughter dyad for Missy would be described as distant and hostile (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). Missy indicated that she felt misunderstood and undervalued, and she described her relationship with her father as “confrontational” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). She stated that they would often yell at one another and that she “didn’t approve of a lot of the things he did” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). According to Missy, her father’s primary way of bonding was through sports, and he did not like the sport Missy played, which was soccer. However, he did approve of the sports her siblings played. As a result, Missy felt a decrease in bonding to her father when compared with her siblings. Currently, Missy’s relationship with her father is not as hostile but continues to be emotionally distant.

As a child and adolescent, the mother-daughter dyad for Missy would be described as a close friendship (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). Missy stated that her childhood was “all about my mom” and “she was the greatest thing” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). She described her mother as “loving, compassionate, hard-working, selfless, and safe.” The mother showed the

client affection through verbal affirmation and hugs. While Missy struggled to bond with her father over sports, her mother rarely missed a soccer game. If faced with a problem, Missy would go to her mother to find a wise and listening ear. Currently, Missy's relationship with her mother continues to be close, but anxiety in their dyad has increased post-wedding.

As a child and adolescent, Missy's relationships with both her brother and sister could be described as harmonious (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008; Scazzero & Bird, 2003). She bonded with her sister while growing up and harbored a small amount of jealousy for her sister's relationship with her father. Currently, Missy's relationship with her sister continues to be harmonious. Missy and her sister were able to spend quality time together prior to her sister's transfer to another college. Missy appears to be troubled by her sister's anorexia. Regarding her brother, Missy looked up to her brother but otherwise indicated no significant relationship influences.

Missy and her husband recently married (see appendix A for the clients' genograms). Their relationship style could be described as loving (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Sueli, 2008). All presenting challenges for the couple are addressed below.

**Observations.** Missy presented on time for our sessions with a comfortable and friendly posture. She maintained eye contact the majority of time but displayed a tendency to look down and grow tense when discussing her father. The client teared up when discussing the connection with her mother. When discussing her marriage, the client furrowed her eyebrows and appeared concerned about their vocational and geographical future. While struggling to attach to her father, Missy feels a strong attachment to her mother and it is that attachment that compels to stay close to her

family.

**Personal History.** Missy grew up in a stable but contentious home. She often conflicted with her father and relied heavily upon her mother. Outside of the home, the client found solace and safety in a best friend, Erica. The client stated that Erica was her “only friend” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). The client displayed nostalgia when discussing Erica but quickly teared up when mentioning a “falling out” later during adolescence. Currently, the client depends solely upon her family and husband for relational connection.

Missy mentioned moving to college as a significant moment in her life. She stated that moving to college allowed her to be more independent because at home, she “didn’t always get what I needed” (M. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2015). She was able to make decisions for herself and make an effort to obtain the relational and emotional connection she desired. However, her pursuit of such connection led Missy to make interpersonal decisions that she would later regret. As a result, another significant milestone in her life was moving back from college and enrolling at a university much closer to home. It was at the university that she met her husband, established connection with a small group of friends, and obtained her bachelor’s degree and teaching certification.

Another significant milestone in Missy’s life was the meeting of her future husband, David. Missy did not have a significant boyfriend prior to dating David. As a result, their courtship provided relational security for Missy. The courtship also forced her to learn how to build a significant relationship outside of her family of origin. Missy had to work to forgive her then fiancée of a disclosed daily use of pornography, but it was

the process of forgiving that caused their relationship to strengthen. Missy would later marry David, who accepted a call into vocational ministry.

Missy desires to be a pastor's wife. She enjoys teaching but hopes to be a stay-at-home mom with three to four children. She stated that she wants her husband to love what he is doing and intimated that she would obtain significant satisfaction if he found a vocational setting within which he could thrive and feel comfortable.

**Developmental and Social History.** Missy reported meeting all developmental milestones on time. She also presented with average social functioning as a child and adolescent. She participated in school activities and thrived in the sport of soccer. While socially active, Missy did struggle to engage in any meaningful friendships outside of her friendship with Erica. Missy experienced a period of isolation and loneliness after she and Erica experienced a conflict that ended their friendship.

**Educational History.** Missy was an honor student throughout both elementary and secondary school. She recently finished her bachelor of arts degree in elementary education. She currently teaches fourth grade in a local school district.

**Medical and Psychiatric History.** Missy had no known medical or psychiatric issues as a child or adolescent.

### **Mental Status**

**Appearance and Behavior.** Missy always appeared on time with appropriate hygiene. She was occasionally dressed in exercise clothes either coming from or going to a workout before or after a session. She embraced the assessment process and stated that she was eager to benefit from its results. Missy displayed a high amount of

focus and resolve. She displayed impatience when discussing those not as focused or driven.

**Cognitive Functioning.** Missy's thinking processes were organized, concrete, and focused on detail (Berk, 2010). Her reasoning focused on concrete concepts, but occasionally included abstract ideas. She is driven by the values of responsibility and order. Missy's perception of situations was reality-based and within normal range for her age. Her loyalty is a primary value, which caused Missy to often over-focus on her family of origin when making decisions (Her difficulty to embrace a possible move is an example of such loyalty). She displayed no short-term or long-term difficulties with memory and appeared to be an above-average learner.

Missy displayed an increased level of anxiousness due to her current life situation as a new wife in a family dyad with tight finances. She also stated that she felt stress regarding an upcoming decision revolving around her husband's education and vocation. Missy displayed sadness when discussing her father but peace when discussing her mother. The displays of both sadness and peace in relation to her family of origin suggest conflicting inner turmoil. Her orientation was always current and appropriate to the situation. There was no suicidal ideation or homicidal ideation either past or present.

### **Assessment Results of David**

The results for the KTS-II, DSI-R, and the GSF are considered to be interpretable. There were no deviations from standard procedures for the KTS-II and the GSF. A subscale in the DSI-R was not considered due to the scale's lack of statistical integrity (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012).

**KTS-II.** David's KTS-II indicates that he would most likely prefer to gather information by looking at big-picture ideas while intuitively connecting the dots of a situation (Keirsey, 1998). Those like David prefer to speak in metaphor and could very possibly exasperate others who desire specific details and facts. He appears to be someone who will make decisions based on the values of mercy and grace. He might have a difficult time making tough decisions because such decisions could cause great discomfort to his spouse, family, friends, or co-workers. Therefore, David will most likely pursue harmony above all. He will desire to process information internally, desiring a workspace that is private and quite (Kroege & Thuesen, 1988). While processing information internally, David could be tempted to not communicate ideas or even be tempted to think that he has verbalized ideas otherwise never shared.

As a husband, leader, family, and friend, those like David desire a schedule that is ordered and precise but will occasionally create marginal space to play and dream (Keirsey, 1998). Persons similar to David prefer closure and are not afraid to make decisions as long as a strong sense of harmony has been achieved. While not afraid to lead, David's best leadership might be behind closed doors, coaching fellow co-workers to reach their potential (Kroege & Thuesen, 1988).

**DSI-R.** The results of the overall DSI-R indicate that David resembles others who are able to maintain a strong sense of self while interacting with spouse, family members, friends, and co-workers (Bowen, 1978; Freidman, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1998; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The DSI-R subscale for emotional reactivity suggests that David will struggle most to maintain a low level of emotional reactivity while in conflict

and the subscale for I-Position indicates that he will also perform best at stating his own thoughts, ideas, and beliefs (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Persons with the same emotional cutoff subscale as David will tend to work through conflict willingly but, at times, hesitantly (Bowen 1978; Kerr & Bowen; 1988). In general, the results of the DSI-R suggest that conflict and stressful situations will be uncomfortable, but that David should be differentiated and committed enough to work through the conflict and stress.

**GSF.** David's GSF profile is similar to those who are most likely to employ intuition when trying to formulate strategy. According to Rath (2007), David's favorite question is most likely "what if" and asking the "what if" question will result in David identifying patterns much more quickly than others. Persons like David are driven by competition that appears fair and winnable. Therefore, they will perform better at tasks that involve comparison and strategy. The GSF also suggests that David enjoys theorizing ideas and desires much time to dream about the future (Rath). Those with David's gifting will grow unhappy and feel depleted if not provided time to dream and brainstorm (Rath). Finally, the GSF indicates that David is most likely driven by deeply held beliefs that tie into family and spiritual connection (Rath). Because of these connections, David is loyal and will do what he can to make sure those he cares about feel valued and loved.

### **Interpretation**

David is a 22 year-old-aged male who is being labeled as the identified patient of the family's system by the client's father. In order to improve his relationship with his father, David will need to continually work on establishing a healthy attachment style

with his father. The result will most likely lead to increased differentiation and healthier attachment with all family member, but especially Missy and their newborn child.

### **Assessment Results of Missy**

The results of Missy's MBTI, DSI-R, and the GSF are considered to be interpretable. There were no deviations from standard procedures for the MBTI and GSF. A subscale of the DSI-R was not considered due to the scale's lack of statistical integrity (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012).

**MBTI.** Missy's MBTI indicates that she would prefer to work alone, gather information by focusing on specific facts or results, strive to make decisions that would be objective, and live life in a very organized manner. Persons like Missy prefer to work alone by inwardly reflecting on thoughts and ideas. However, Kroeger and Thuesen (1989) indicated that individuals like Missy could also be extroverted when such extroversion is tied to duty. When facing a problem or task, Missy would most likely work to gather as many details possible when trying to identify a solution. If Missy has to make a decision, she will strive to make objective judgments that honor well-established processes and expectations. A person with a similar personality type feels a strong sense of duty to safeguard such established processes and expectations (Keirsey, 1998; Kroeger & Thuesen; 1989). When orienting their lives, persons similar to Missy will focus on order. If their lives or the lives of family members are not oriented in an orderly way, Missy will most likely work to create order and expect those around her to follow the created order. Kroeger and Thuesen (1989) stated individuals with Missy's personality type could be described by two primary words: order and responsibility.

**DSI-R.** The results of the DSI-R indicate that Missy might have difficulty maintaining emotional and mental composure when interacting within a family or workplace system. Skowron and Friedlander (1998) intimated that a person with similar DSI-R results would display increased levels of emotional flooding, emotional lability, and hypersensitivity when responding to any environmental stimuli. Therefore, within any environment, Missy would most likely struggle to state personal desires and interests due to such hypersensitivity and emotional reactivity. However, according to the DSI-R and the emotional cutoff subscale, Missy should be able to manage the uncomfortable nature of intense emotional reactions to the point that she is able to stay within the system. Persons whose differentiation of self is lower than Missy's would prefer to leave an emotionally intense system. The results of the DSI-R, in combination with the results of the MBTI, suggest that Missy would react negatively to a family or workplace system that does not follow well-established rules or expectations.

**GSF.** Missy's GSF profile signifies that she would most likely thrive in family and workplace systems that call on her to fulfill roles and responsibilities deeply embedded in that system's history (Rath, 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2009). She would thrive in such systems because she would most likely feel a strong tie to its rules and beliefs. According to Missy, any action within the system must honor and uphold the same deeply held beliefs established by the system. As indicated by the results of the MBTI, Missy might struggle to understand and could grow frustrated with anyone who does not safeguard a system's well-established expectations. The GSF results indicate that Missy would be a strategic leader who coaches her employees and co-workers primarily through the building of interpersonal relationships (Rath & Conchie).

## **Interpretation**

Missy is a 22 year-old-aged female who was formerly labeled as the identified patient of the family's system by the client's father. Missy could continue to improve her relationship with her father by working on establishing a healthy attachment style with her father. The result will most likely lead to increased differentiation and healthier attachment with all family members, but especially David and their newborn child.

## **Case Formulation**

The concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) and Attachment Theory (AT) were used to construct a case formulation for the client. Five of the eight concepts of BFST are used: family projection process and more specifically, identified patient; nuclear family emotional system and more specifically, homeostasis; differentiation of self, generational transmission, and emotional triangles (Bowen, 1978; Freidman, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Attachment Theory was used to identify the client as presenting with either secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles (Bowlby, 1998; Clinton & Sibcy, 2006; 2014). Each conceptual construct will include a leadership component identifying possible ways the client's psychopathology might affect her leadership efficacy.

**Family Projection Process and the Identified Patient.** Individual results from the DSI-R intimate that both David and Missy were labeled the identified patients by their respective fathers within their families of origin. For David, his father placed upon him the emotional stress from the cutoff and estranged relationship he had with David's paternal grandfather. For Missy, her father most likely placed upon her the emotional

stress developed within the dyad of Missy's paternal grandfather and paternal grandmother who divorced.

David's and Missy's increased levels of emotional reactivity, as indicated by the DSI-R, MBTI, and KTS-II, are partially due to being labeled as identified patients. Missy has recently been replaced by her sister as identified patient. David continues to be labeled the identified patient within his family of origin. David and Missy's marriage will most likely be one of increased emotional reactivity unless a crisis occurs that encourages them to learn how to decrease emotional reactivity.

**Nuclear Family Emotional System and Homeostasis.** The homeostasis of both David's and Missy's families of origins were stable. However, stability did not equal healthy attachment. David's mother was somewhat cut off from David's father, as was Missy's mother from Missy's father. As a result, David and Missy most likely enter marriage without the ability to engage in secure attachment due to the lack of modeling of healthy attachment with their families of origin. The desire to create a healthy homeostasis through secure attachment is present within the couple, but they will have to work hard to establish such a system. Again, a crisis could aid in the development of secure attachment and a healthier homeostasis.

**Differentiation of Self.** The DSI-R results for both David and Missy suggest that each person will struggle to maintain an increased level of differentiation within their marriage. As a result of low differentiation, David and Missy will most likely encounter difficulty in stating personal desires, needs, and wants (Bowen, 1978; Friedman, 1985; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This suggested lack of honest communication could produce an increased level of emotional reactivity and stress. Their levels of differentiation are

additional reasons, along with being labeled their respective families' identified patients, why their dyad already experiences a high level of emotional reactivity.

**Generational Transmission.** According to David's genogram, lack of attachment with a father figure is a characteristic that is shared from one generation to the next. Missy's genogram also suggests that lack of attachment with a father figure is shared from one generation to the next. Both persons with such generational transmission increase the likelihood that any possible son would struggle to attach to David. This type of generational transmission also increases the possibility that David will doubt his parenting skills and that Missy could quickly project her disappointment with her father onto David's efforts to parent a son.

**Emotional Triangles.** David's genogram displays David being triangulated by his father into a father-paternal grandfather conflict. David's father is placing anxiety, existing between David's father and David's paternal grandfather, upon David. Missy's genogram suggests that Missy is being triangulated by her father into a father-family of origin conflict. Missy's father is placing upon Missy the anxiety produced by the lack of attachment, discord, and cutoff produced from her paternal grandparents' divorce.

**Attachment Theory.** David's genogram suggests that he experiences avoidant attachment with his father but secure attachment with his mother. Missy's genogram suggests that she experiences anxious attachment with her father but secure attachment with her mother. Currently, David and Missy display anxious attachment with characteristics of secure attachment being developed.

## **Clinical Impressions**

David: Situational Specific Phobia (300.29)

David currently presents with the symptoms listed below of Specific Phobia (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5: DSM-5, 2013). The primary phobia manifests itself through fear of choking due to eating certain foods.

### **Qualifying Criteria**

- Marked fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation
- The phobic object or situation almost always provokes immediate fear or anxiety
- The phobic object or situation is actively avoided or endured with intense fear or anxiety
- The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual danger posed by the specific object or situation and to the sociocultural context
- The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is persistent, typically lasting for 6 months or more

Missy: Parent-Child Relational Problem (V61.20)

Missy currently presents with the symptoms listed below of Parent-Child Relational Problem (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5: DSM-5; 2013).

### **Qualifying Criteria**

- Inadequate involvement with child
- Excessive parental pressure
- Avoidance without resolution of problems

## **Recommendations and Summary**

It is suggested that David and Missy contemplate the following recommendations in an effort to maintain holistic health as individuals and within their marriage.

1. David: Enter into psychotherapy in order to identify any fears or anxieties that underlie the diagnosed phobia
2. Missy: Enter into psychotherapy in order to address the diagnosed parent-child relationship problem
3. David and Missy: Obtain life coaching to help the couple process upcoming educational and vocational decisions
4. David and Missy: Enter into marital counseling in order to increase levels of and develop more secure attachment styles within their marriage--the following theories could be beneficial to the couple:
  - a. Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy by Johnson (2004)
  - b. Worthington's (2003) model of forgiveness known as REACH
  - c. The Shults and Sandage (2006) concept of spiritual crucible will be used to help David and Missy learn the necessity of embracing crucible seasons for growth
5. David and Missy: Develop and execute a consistent workout routine
6. David and Missy: Continue to engage in a faith-based community
7. David and Missy: Establish a new homeostasis by moving away to pursue David's theological education
8. David and Missy: Move toward a more secure attachment through the shared love of sports

The client is a newly married couple that recently married and is entering into a life phase of furthering education and geographical relocation. Both David and Missy would benefit from the establishment of healthier patterns of attachment with their respective fathers. There is an increased risk of low differentiation passing onto their children if the couple does not work to establish secure patterns of attachment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CONDUCT OF THERAPY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Pre-Session—Establishing the Start of a Healthy Therapeutic Alliance**

David and Missy asked for a pre-counseling appointment in order to prepare for marital counseling. The goal for this session as a counselor was to start the establishment of a strong therapeutic alliance. We spent most of our time reviewing the overall process of therapy, which will include genogram formation, an emphasis on emotional connection, understanding and empathizing, and sharing honestly with one another. The counselor purposely talked about Atlanta Falcons football with David and soccer with Missy in order to promote a therapeutic alliance.

#### **Session 1—The Dance of EFCT Begins**

The clients presented on time, appropriately groomed for the cold weather, and appeared cheerful. David stated that he was “nervous” regarding the beginning of counseling and Missy expressed a “fear of exposure” during the counseling process. Missy said that her parents had gone to see a counselor only when they had been close to a divorce. The counselor assured David and Missy that their apprehensions were normal and encouraged the couple to embrace the process and expect for the best.

**David’s Family Genogram.** We spent the majority of the time discussing David’s relationship with his father and developing a genogram of David’s family (see appendix A). David told the story of little league baseball, stating that he always played with fear (The naming of fear as an emotion is important and a first step in helping David

understand and express that fear to his wife). David stated that regardless of the level of athletic performance or effort, his was never pleased. We focused on three issues regarding David's father: David's desire for acceptance, the need for the David and Missy to put up a boundary between them and David's father, and David's love for sports in relation to bonding with his father.

My assessment is that David will need to work on trusting Missy's acceptance. The anxiety that David is experiencing is due in large part of a fear of not being accepted. David will also need to work on putting up boundaries with his father, as well as exploring the sporting realm to connect in a healing way with his father. Missy will need to work on showing David unconditional support, respect, and love as David wrestles with being accepted and approved. If Missy is able to provide support, respect, and love, the emotional dance of their marriage will grow stronger and lead to greater levels of secure attachment and increased differentiation.

David and Missy will report back next week when a genogram of Missy's family will be constructed.

## **Session 2—The EFCT Dance Continues**

David and Missy appeared on time appropriately groomed and appeared giddy. Missy stated that she was ready to review her family history. She indicated that the relationship with her father was "fine," but then went on to express that "he never came to my sporting events." Missy played soccer and as indicated by her, her father did not understand soccer. Missy also indicated that their relationship experienced "constant confrontation" her sophomore year of high school. According to Missy, her father had

lied to her mother regarding finances and the result was that the lying “caused me to be distrustful with my dad.” Regarding Missy’s mother, she stated that her mother tried to “overcompensate” for the lack of her father’s attention and that “we got to bond and spend a lot of time together.”

**Missy’s Family Genogram.** We discussed Missy’s relationships with her mother and father. We talked about a possible bonding issue with David due to the fact that Missy’s father had difficulties bonding with her. We also highlighted any projection of lack of trust in her father that Missy projects onto David. We finally connected Missy’s focus on finances to her father’s lack of truth regarding their family’s finances.

Missy experiences an avoidant attachment style with her father. Over time, her relationship with her father has shown slow signs of improvement. Missy experiences a secure attachment with her mother. As indicated above, David will need to be aware of any bonding and trust issues that creep into her relationship with David. The counselor believes that David and Missy will eventually have difficulty bonding with one another and any children they might have in the future due to Missy’s projection of unresolved father/daughter conflict onto David and David’s projection of unresolved father/son conflict onto Missy. This bonding could manifest itself in either an avoidant or anxious attachment style. Finally, the counselor would not be surprised if Missy’s father bonds more with David than Missy because the two males share a love for sports that goes beyond the sport of soccer.

### **Session 3—An Important Step Through the Expression of Financial Anxiety**

David and Missy reported on time for their session well groomed and appeared upbeat. The conversation started with Missy making a comment that one of her roles in the relationship was to be more of “the planner.” A discussion followed identifying Missy’s desire to be “the planner” because David is the one who is identified as more laissez-faire in the relationship. This discussion allowed us to arrive at deeper desires: Missy’s desire for David to be respectful of her request to more promptly address monthly budget needs and David’s desire for Missy to provide him more “space.” We addressed the necessity to understand the desires and expectations underlying any requests in marriage.

Missy’s anxiety regarding their future financial situation continues to remain elevated. I am both encouraged and concerned at the rate this couple conflicts and argues. On the one hand, they are extremely honest with each other sharing emotions of distress, anger, shame, and fear. On the other hand, I am afraid that there will continually be so much tension in the relationship that the couple will have a hard time arriving at times of dwelling that would produce bonding, intimacy, greater levels of differentiation of self, and more secure attachment.

David and Missy could increase more secure attachment by setting aside times to create positive connection through their shared loves of sports and fitness. They could also agree to date night experiences where they purposely explore other areas of interests that they share. My eventual hope for the couple is that they would not only be able to engage in shared interests, but that their relationship would grow through experiences

that are diverse. They could increase their mutual understanding of and respect for one another through such diverse experiences.

The couple will report back for marital counseling in two weeks. They were assigned homework regarding expectations for the social, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial realms of their marriage.

#### **Session 4—Unidentified Emotions Start Being Expressed**

Missy appeared distraught, as if she had been crying. Missy stated that “everything was fine until last night” when David questioned her commitment to Christ.

We discussed how Missy felt about David’s words. David addressed the reasons why he believes he said what he said. We then talked about the necessity for honesty and forgiveness in a marital relationship. The counselor pointed out that a difference in understanding each other’s spiritual pathways is the core issue. The counselor also pointed out that David and Missy are responsible for their own spiritual walk and development.

David will need to work continually on understanding Missy’s spiritual pathway as different from his pathway. At this point, David is not working to understand and empathize with Missy’s desires and emotions because he struggles to understand and embrace his own desires and emotions. Before David will be able to engage emotionally with Missy, he must learn to engage his own emotions. Missy will need to continue to be honest with David regarding his insensitivity to her spiritual walk. The counselor believes that a small amount of complementarian theology crept into their relationship with David feeling “responsible” for Missy’s spiritual walk.

## **Session 5—Restructuring Couple Interaction Through the Discussion of Finances**

David contacted the counselor earlier this morning to request that today's counseling session address financial matters. While appearing warm with each other, Missy immediately stated that they had had a "fight" earlier this morning, but that the fight was timely due to the marital counseling. Missy said that their conversation would have been different had they experienced the counseling session prior to the fight. Also, Missy indicated that David continues to state that they are not "one" unit "yet" when it comes to finances. Their financial conflict is a continual theme from above; Missy wants David to be more financially responsible and David wants to address financial matters with his own value system.

We discussed three skills of healthy communication: "I" statements, reflective listening, and active listening. We also addressed the need to use these skills in order to understand the core purpose behind a spouse's communication. We then talked about the different financial desires both David and Missy have for their marriage. The counselor once again reminded David and Missy the need to use a feelings chart in order to help them understand and communicate their feelings to one another.

At this point in the marriage, attachment is insecure and differentiation of self is very low. David's inability to sacrifice for Missy's desire to be more financially responsible surprised the counselor. My desire, as a counselor, is to explore the reasons behind this inability. Also, Missy appears to be very concerned regarding their future finances. David and Missy will have significant troubles as a marital couple if David does not see her sincere desire for financial restraint. Again, David must grow his skills to

understand and empathize. The counselor is curious to see how the dyad's communication improves over the next seven days.

David and Missy are supposed to work on reflective conversations at the end of every day for the next week by using "I" statements, reflective listening, and active listening. These conversations are short fifteen minute dialogues where each person is supposed to share the highs and lows of their day and the emotions they experienced with each high and low. They are also supposed to use their feelings chart when communicating with one another.

### **Important In-Between Session Developments—Application of REACH**

David asked to meet with the counselor between marital counseling sessions. David confessed to the counselor that he had been dealing with a pornographic addiction. The counselor asked David if he had confessed the pornographic addiction to his spouse. David said no, and the counselor encouraged David to do so. David was immediately hesitant and afraid. David stated, "But I am afraid how she will respond." The counselor strongly encouraged David to do so anyway in order to practice confession and bring his sin into the light of their marriage.

David confessed to Missy his addiction. Missy responded by breaking into tears and saying, "How could you?" Missy, after crying for a few minutes, looked up at David and said, "I love you and we will get through this together." David then agreed to allow Missy unhindered access to his phone. 1 Peter 4:8 stated that love covers a multitude of sin. Missy's loving forgiveness and accountability resulted in David committing to and keeping the promise to no longer look at pornography.

The counselor was deeply proud of Missy for practicing the principles of REACH. She recalled the hurt through its honest confrontation, empathically tried to understand David's desire to look at pornography, altruistically chose to forgive David, committed to public forgiveness by sharing her decision with the counselor, and held on to the forgiveness. As a result of Missy's loving forgiveness, David's sin has been covered with love and his viewing of pornography has completely stopped. David must stay vigilant in his desire to not view pornography because it is likely that increased times of stress will cause David to experience a greater desire to relapse. It would benefit David and Missy to pre-emptively identify strategies that David could use to avoid pornography when tempted.

### **Session 6—The Continued Restructuring of Couple Interaction**

Both spouses presented well-dressed. David was late due to work on a class assignment. David indicated that sex “was not discussed” in his house growing up and that sex was learned through the “grapevine.” Missy stated that sex was discussed in her family of origin only because of “going to the doctor” and that “I asked about it one time.”

We discussed David’s past pornography use. The counselor praised Missy for her loving forgiveness and accountability. The counselor explained to the couple that men primarily use pornography for medication and not sex. I encouraged David to continually be honest with Missy regarding his emotional needs. And, I encouraged Missy to be very aware of those emotional needs while also communicating her own emotional desires and expectations.

We then discussed expectations that both David and Missy have regarding marital sex. Frequency, atmospheric expectations, emotional expectations, and physical expectations were addressed. We also discussed the need to allow Missy to set the pace of intimacy.

Sexual communication will be key for the couple. The counselor is concerned about the fact that neither David nor Missy grew up in a home that talked about sex. The couple will need to also have positive role models speaking favorably about sex to continually overcome any stigma or shame associated with sex.

### **Session 7—Celebrating the Dance**

The last arranged counseling session reviewed the original goals established by the therapist and client: genogram formation, an emphasis on emotional connection, understanding and empathizing, and sharing honestly with one another. We agreed that all the goals had been met. David and Missy stated that they felt more connected and at ease in their marriage. They both told the counselor that they were grateful for his help.

### **Session 8—Entering the Crucible**

David and Missy asked to see the counselor after three months of being away from counseling. They requested to do so in order to get some life coaching regarding career plans. David was contemplating enrolling in a seminary, which would result in a large geographical move for him and Missy.

David and Missy expressed that their parents had anxiety and fear over their possible move. Surprisingly, the majority of the fear and anxiety expressed was coming

from Missy's parents, specifically her mother. It appeared as if the secure attachment that was present during the original marital counseling was either misdiagnosed or something had occurred to change the mother-daughter homeostasis.

The counselor asked the couple what had promoted their desire to now consider a long-distance seminary move. The couple listed three factors:

- David's unease in his current ministry setting
- David's increase in an anxiety-related phobia
- An honest desire to follow God's calling on their life

The counselor asked David and Missy how much their parents' anxiety and fear were weighing on their decision-making process. The couple replied that they felt as if they were not going to be able to establish their own family of origin unless they moved away. Their fear of not being able to establish their own family of origin is why they expect a move to decrease David's anxiety related phobia. They believe that this phobia is directly related to his relationship with his father. David and Missy cannot know for sure if there is a connection between David's anxiety and his father unless he enters into psychotherapy. Again, Missy expressed that her mother was not honoring marital boundaries. The conclusion at the end of the session was that David and Missy would move away so David could attend seminary.

After meeting with David and Missy, it appeared as if the crucible of having to pray and wrestle with the idea of moving had grown them closer. They also grew closer as a couple as they navigated their parents' anxieties and fears. The counselor believes differentiation from family of origin can be increased if the couple moves for seminary. However, the counselor also believes that learning to place boundaries within their

current geographical setting could lead to greater increases of differentiation than a geographical move.

### **Session 9—The Crucible Changes**

Only days after meeting with the counselor, David asked to speak with the counselor by phone. The urgent phone call was desired so that David could tell the counselor that they were pregnant and request a meeting. The counselor congratulated David and an appointment date and time were established.

During our session together, David and Missy desired once again to discuss moving. After weighing the pros and cons, the couple decided to postpone their move for seminary so that they could capitalize on the familial resources that will be needed once Missy gives birth. They agreed to one another to not give up the plan to move but only postpone the move until a post-birth rhythm of life was established.

At this point in the session, the counselor once again reminded David and Missy that parenting would be another crucible through which their marriage could grow. We then discussed how the crucible would be found not only in the process of child rearing but also in the continual setting of boundaries with David's and Missy's families. The counselor told David and Missy that, in many ways, the original fear and anxiety in their family systems might increase due to the grandparents' desires to see their new grandchild.

## **Session 10—The Continual Crucible of Parenthood**

Three months after their last session, the counselor asked to meet with the couple to assess their development as a couple and to inquire about the status of the pregnancy. A mini-crucible was experienced during the session when David shared with the counselor that Missy was experiencing bleeding. The counselor encouraged Missy to share her concerns. She communicated the emotions of fear and uncertainty very well. We then used both David's and Missy's presenting anxieties to talk about trust in God during the difficult times of adulthood.

The session ended with David and Missy thanking the counselor for his care and emphasis upon crucible seasons. They asked to possibly see the counselor again once their child was born. The counselor agreed.

### **Post-Counseling Assessment**

The counselor is extremely proud of and grateful for his work with David and Missy. The following conclusions have been reached:

- David and Missy used counseling to increase understanding and sharing of emotions. The increased understanding and sharing of emotions resulted in what Johnson (2004) called a successful restructuring of the relationship.
- David and Missy navigated the seeking cycle of confession and repentance well after David practiced the discipline of confession with Missy. As a result of the confession and forgiveness, more secure attachment was established.
- David and Missy navigated their first crucible of decision making very well. They were honest with one another and with their families of origin. Their

expressed honesty was a marked improvement of differentiation for both David and Missy because they were able to individually state their desires in front of their respective fathers.

- David and Missy are entering into another crucible through parenthood. How they handle that crucible is to be determined, but the counselor hopes that their continued growth will assist them in being securely attached and modeling differentiation with their child.

### **What Have I Learned**

I entered this thesis process with the theory that differentiation determines attachment styles. However, after reading and after studying David and Missy, I have come to believe the exact opposite: attachment styles determine differentiation. While Bowlby (1988) emphasized the connection between the mother and child as of paramount importance to attachment, the case of David and Missy displayed the reality that father-child attachment can also have a major effect on the identity development of a child. Both David and Missy experienced insecure attachment with their fathers and the result was that David lacked self-confidence and Missy had low ability to trust.

I also learned that couples are unable to grow without crucible experiences. I did not set out to study the crucible effect on young marriages. However, I quickly saw the reality of crucibles in the Smiths' marriage once I began this program. As a result of seeing the necessity of crucibles in marriage, I have begun emphasizing marital crucible preparation in my own premarital and marital counseling practices.

I additionally grew to have a much greater appreciation for confession and

forgiveness in marriage. While I strongly believed the words of 1 John 1:9 as I started this thesis, I grew to a passionate conviction that the words of James 5:16, regarding confession and healing, a paramount to a healthy marriage. I now teach marital couples that confession and forgiveness has both a vertical element (confessing and receiving forgiveness from God) and a horizontal element (confessing and receiving forgiveness from a spouse).

Finally, but not exhaustively, I now believe that the two most important words that spouses can say to each other are, “I need.” While researching and applying the principles of EFCT to this thesis and real-time counseling practices, I noticed that spouses struggled with identifying and communicating their emotions and the desires that went along with those emotions. Once spouses were able to identify what they were feeling and their desires based on their feelings, I found the use of the words “I need” to be an effective first step at fostering deeper levels of emotionally intimate conversation.

### **Next Steps**

According to Barna (2017), a spouse entering vocational ministry has a greater likelihood of experiencing the following:

- A spousal relationship that is rated as below average or poor.
- A parent-child relationship that is rated as below average or poor.
- Ministry being difficult on their family.
- Mental and emotional health rated as average, below average, or poor.
- Frequent feelings of emotional and mental exhaustion.
- Low confidence regarding ministry calling.

*Barna's research is an indicator that ministry itself is a continuous crucible experience. Young newly wed couples entering into marriage and vocational ministry at the same time would benefit from understanding that they start marriage in a crucible. How a young ministry couple handles the crucible of vocational ministry will determine whether or not their marriage is strengthened or weakened by the vocational ministry crucible.*

I believe that family of origin strongly affects how ministerial spouses and their partners encounter the crucible of vocational ministry. The majority of literature on BFST and AT like Bowen (1978), Kerr and Bowen (1988), Bowlby (1988), and Johnson (2004) emphasize the theory of circular feedback loops in a system. A ministerial family and their ministry exist in a feedback loop where the family's health affects ministry performance and a ministry's environment affects family health. I believe the key to a healthy feedback loop lies in a person's family of origin. Families of origin with high differentiation and secure attachment increase the likelihood that a ministry spouse and their family will experience secure attachment, high differentiation, healthier churches, and healthier staff teams. If a minister and their family have low differentiation and insecure attachment styles, they must work like David and Missy to identify emotions, communicate those emotions, and practice confession and forgiveness.

As a result of my interest in ministerial difficult and marital health, I would like to study more ministerial couples that are in an early stage in marriage. I would then like to take my findings and turn them into a resource to help young ministerial couples understand that vocational ministry is a continuous crucible and that they are to embrace crucibles for the purpose of marital and spiritual growth. I would even like to propose a

possible premarital curriculum that teaches young couples that crucibles are unpreventable and can even be holy. The possible curriculum would follow an outline similar to the rough draft outline below:

- Session 1: Theology of Family: God's Design for a Healthy Family
- Session 2: Genogram: Know Your Family, Shape Your Marriage
- Session 3: Family Conflict: The Blame Game
- Session 4: Family Bonding: Caring Too Much or Not Enough
- Session 5: Developing Intimacy: Spending Time Together
- Session 6: Developing Intimacy: Communicating on a Deeper Level
- Session 7: Developing Intimacy: Under the Sheets and in the Backyard
- Session 8: The Most Important Ingredient for Growing a Marriage, Tension
- Session 9 (for Minister's and their spouses): Ministry as a Continuous Crucible Experience

Additionally, I would enjoy taking my theory on crucibles and marital health to a more developed level. I would like to study the different types of crucibles couples experience throughout their marital journeys. A few questions I would like to research are:

- How are crucibles different for a marital couple in their third decade of marriage in comparison to newly wed couples?
- What types of crucibles do marital couples experience as they near the end of life?
- Are there crucibles that affect a marriage more than others? If so, why is that and what can be done to navigate each crucible effectively?

- What specific ministry experiences lead to vocational ministry being a continuous crucible for a newly wed couple?

In closing, I am finishing this thesis with a hopeful heart that the experiences and skills I gained throughout this doctoral process will be used to help young couples like Pete and Traci and Missy and David not only survive life and ministry, but thrive. And, I pray that we all would learn to embrace crucible seasons for what they can be; gifts from God that can be used to strengthen the attachments within our families. May we all journey well through crucible seasons with our Creator and Redeemer.

APPENDIX

GENOGRAMS

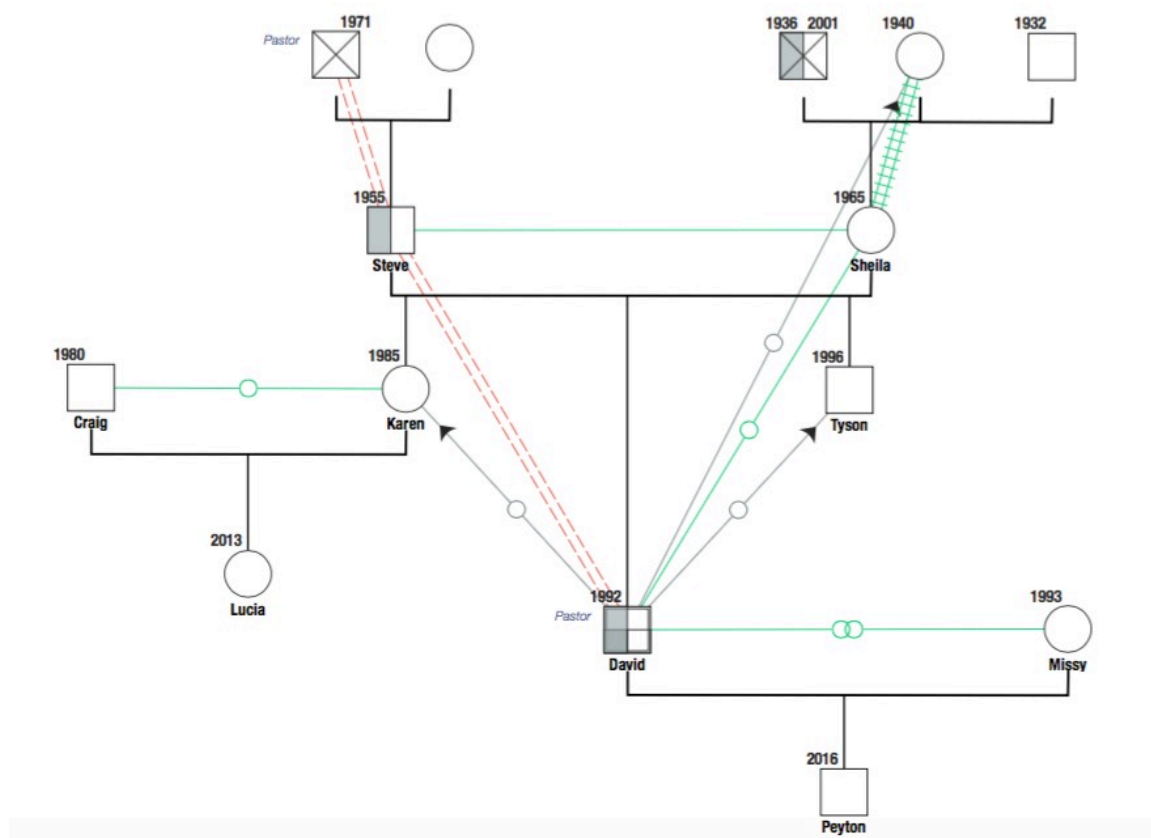


Figure 2. David's Genogram



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